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The President's Daily Brief

December 13, 1976

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~~*Top Secret*~~ 25X1

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LEBANON: *President Sarkis' appointment of a cabinet of technocrats last week appears to have given most Lebanese confidence that he will assert his authority over the political leaders who fomented the war.*

The formation of an apolitical government was indeed a victory for Sarkis over those who argued for a cabinet that reflected the interests of major Lebanese political factions.

Sarkis passed his first major test primarily because of Syrian military backing, but his own careful planning and strong support from the Christian Phalange Party were factors. Leftist leader Kamal Jumblatt also strongly endorsed the new cabinet. Among other key Christian and Muslim leaders, only Christian extremist Camille Shamun has voiced opposition.

Confidence in Sarkis and the generally favorable reaction to the cabinet should improve the government's chances of being granted emergency powers by parliament.

Sarkis wants to establish security and begin reconstruction before he tackles the contentious issue of political reform. He hopes to have an overall reconstruction program well underway before peace talks begin between Christians and Muslims lest it become a subject of sectarian bargaining.

Principal opposition to Sarkis will come from Shamun and Jumblatt.

Both have warned that the restructuring of Lebanon's political order must take precedence over other matters. They seem aware that Sarkis is trying to push both Christians and Muslims into positions that would force them to accept compromises.

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Ironically, Shamun and Jumblatt will probably join forces to oppose Sarkis' plan to declare a state of emergency and to seek extraordinary powers from parliament. They do not, however, control enough parliamentary deputies to block the President's requests.

Fighting in southern Lebanon between Israeli-backed Christian troops and Muslim and Palestinian forces appears to have tapered off.

Reports in the Beirut press over the past several days that large numbers of Palestinians and heavy weapons are being moved to the Arqub and other points in the south are likely to keep tensions high. We have no independent confirmation that such movements are taking place.

Lebanese radio stations formerly held by rival Christian and Muslim groups integrated their operations over the weekend, and broadcasts on the security situation have stopped. President Sarkis has encouraged and may eventually impose formal censorship on reporting of security matters in an effort to prevent tensions in one area from spreading to other parts of the country.

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NOTES

Activity by some Spanish leftists, possibly aimed at influencing the referendum on political reform to be held on Wednesday, is unlikely to affect the expected favorable vote.

Authorities have announced that a left-wing terrorist organization is apparently responsible for the kidnaping on Saturday of Antonio Mario de Oriol. Oriol, a wealthy Basque and former Franco supporter, is president of the advisory Council of State and a member of Spain's highest consultative body, the Council of the Realm. Early speculation credited Basque separatists with the abduction. 25X1

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Vietnam may be preparing to send three regiments into Laos, a development which would further fuel Thailand's anxiety about the intentions of its Indochinese neighbors.

If such Vietnamese troop movements do occur, we believe they would be a response to the situation in Laos rather than an indication of aggressive designs against Thailand.

Hanoi is committed to various construction projects in Laos, which would benefit from additional manpower to supplement some 30,000 Vietnamese troops already in the country.

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[redacted] the Lao government is contending with continued rightist dissidence [redacted] The Vietnamese were initially reluctant to participate in anti-insurgent operations in Laos, but the ineffectiveness of the Pathet Lao has increasingly drawn Vietnamese troops into joint operations.

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Hanoi has reacted sharply to official Thai statements warning of Vietnamese aggression against Thailand, claiming such charges are an excuse for more US military aid and the reopening of US military bases in Thailand.

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